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10 June 2016

Mrs Sharon FitzGerald
Headteacher
Houldsworth Valley Primary School
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Dear Mrs FitzGerald

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Houldsworth Valley Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 23 May 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- evaluate the impact of the systematic monitoring, so that you can clearly identify what is working and what requires further improvement
- share the best practice found in the school to bring teaching, learning and assessment up to the standard of the best
- accelerate the progress of the most able pupils in lower key stage 2.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. The post-Ofsted rapid improvement plan was evaluated along with the school's evaluation of its own performance. Together, we visited all year groups to observe pupils' learning. I looked at books to see the progress that pupils are making over time. The school's own information regarding pupils' progress was also considered.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection you have made a number of appointments for September 2016. These appointments will strengthen and add further capacity to the leadership team.

You have recently received a warning notice from the regional schools commissioner. You are working with school governors to respond appropriately.

Main findings

- Although disappointed with the outcomes of the section 5 inspection, leaders and governors have focused on the right priorities and wasted no time in addressing the areas for improvement identified in the report. Leaders and governors focus on one rapid improvement plan. You are now able to review the impact of your actions so that you can amend your planning further.
- You have clarified the roles and responsibilities of leaders. They are more involved in monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. As a result, the impact of leadership is shared and you are supported in your role as you move the school forward on its journey of improvement.
- Through sharper performance management targets and termly reports to the governing body, you are holding staff more firmly to account for the progress that pupils make. Middle leaders demonstrate a commitment and enthusiasm for their roles. They make a strong contribution to raising standards. With the new appointments that are due to start in September, you do not see any barriers to becoming a good school at the next inspection.
- The English and mathematics leaders are taking the initiative in training staff. From their monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment they choose the most relevant areas to address. Since the inspection, teachers have received training to enhance their knowledge and skills in teaching grammar. As a result, they are more precise when instructing pupils to improve their writing. In upper key stage 2, the impact of this training has been particularly strong. The progress that pupils are now making in this subject is in line with that expected nationally. The evidence in pupils' books shows they are applying

their knowledge and understanding of grammar and punctuation well. They take care when improving their work.

- You and your staff are using assessment information in a much more rigorous way. You have relevant information that is shared regularly with governors about the attainment and progress of groups of pupils. In meetings, staff identify the next course of action to accelerate the progress of pupils in their class. Everyone is involved and contributes to the progress that pupils make.
- Your school assessment information shows that the proportion of pupils who are making better progress is increasing. In mathematics pupils are making accelerated progress. Through the introduction of 'maths meetings' you are ensuring that pupils can address gaps and misconceptions from previous teaching. Therefore, in Year 5 and Year 6, pupils are making faster progress and have a greater understanding of mathematical strategies and concepts.
- In mathematics lessons teachers have clarity in their explanations. The learning that is planned helps to deepen pupils' understanding and reasoning skills. For example, in one lesson pupils reflected on their learning of fractions and identified their own areas for further challenge. They completed this activity with maturity and honesty, so that the teacher can plan and provide future activities that precisely meet their needs. In Year 6, the most able mathematicians were supporting each other as they grappled with the challenges of algebra. They enjoyed the opportunity to discuss and attempt different strategies to find solutions. They told me that they feel well prepared for secondary school.
- In writing, you are leading improvements at pace. Right from Reception, children are developing their writing skills. They are keen to practise their writing at every opportunity. These young children enjoy their learning and are making great gains in their basic skills. You have evidence to demonstrate that this year children's achievement in early years is set to be an improvement on 2015. Already, a larger proportion of children have achieved the expected standard in writing. Children proudly show their 'golden mentions' that they have been awarded for their writing.
- In the rest of the school, pupils are practising their skills and abilities by writing in other subjects such as history, geography and science as well as in English. There is much evidence of writing across the curriculum since the last inspection. For example, in one lesson pupils were using what they know about Henry VIII to write a detailed report. Teachers have adopted your preferred approach to planning lessons, which has resulted in teachers carefully considering the needs of different groups and providing learning to meet their needs appropriately. Consequently, pupils are making progress in writing at a faster rate than expected.
- According to your records, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving and much is securing good progress over time. The school evidence shows that the systematic monitoring, support and challenge is having an impact. You are improving the quality and consistency of teaching as a result. However, where there is good practice in teaching, this is not

shared enough so that staff benefit from each other's expertise.

- You recognise that still more can be done for the most able pupils in lower key stage 2, so they receive the stretch and challenge they need to make sustained progress and achieve their capabilities. Provision for the most able pupils is more thoughtfully planned in some areas of the school. Where it happens well, these pupils show a mature attitude to their learning that helps them persevere with challenging tasks.
- Governors have received their external review and are fully committed to improving the school swiftly. Governors now meet more regularly and have already undertaken additional training. They have reviewed safeguarding policies and procedures to assure themselves of their statutory duty to keep children safe and secure. Plans are firmly in place for governors to review some of the priorities from the rapid improvement plan through gaining the views of pupils across the school.

External support

You are receiving additional support from the local authority's associate standards and excellence officer. The external training and moderation of the work of middle leaders has been successful and these leaders are clear about the impact of their work.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kim Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector